

RAMAKRISHNA

THE MAN
AND
THE POWER

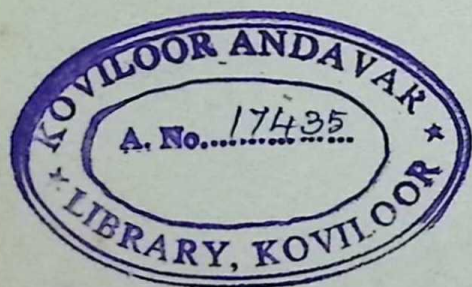
SWAMI
GNANESWARANANDA

A.No. 17435

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The life of Sri Ramakrishna proves that the greatest breadth, the highest catholicity and the utmost intensity can exist side by side in the same individual, and that society also can be constructed like that, for society is nothing but an aggregate of individuals. The formation of such a perfect character is the ideal of this age.

—Swami Vivekananda



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RAMAKRISHNA

THE MAN AND THE POWER

BY
SWAMI GNANESWARANANDA

லெ. இராமானுஜன், எம்.ஏ.,
தமிழ்ப் பேராசிரியர்,
24-A, புது வீடு,
கோகலை ஹால் தெரு.
சிவகங்கை - 623 560.



ADVAITA ASHRAMA
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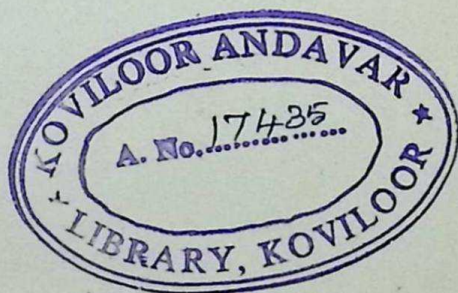
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On the rough voyage of life,
Let God thy pole-star be.
Know that He shines in every heart,
And thou shalt now be free!



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Preface to the Indian Edition

This book was first published in 1936 as the Ramakrishna Centenary Memorial Edition by the Vedanta Society (at 120 East Delaware Place) of Chicago. The author of the book, who was also head of the above Vedanta Centre, passed away unfortunately in 1937.

As the book was greatly appreciated by the reading public, we have brought out the present Indian edition which, we hope, will meet with equal reception.

Mayavati
1946

AUTHOR'S APOLOGIA

Being asked to write a book on Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda once said that he did not dare, for fear that trying to mould the image of Shiva he might produce only that of a monkey. The personality of Ramakrishna is as vast and universal as the sky, of which an admirer or a critic can present only a partial view, and that coloured by his own limited understanding. "Ramakrishna, the Man and the Power," should, therefore, be considered as such. It purports to be a presentation from the viewpoint of a modern, for the special benefit of free-thinking minds that seek a solution of present-day problems.

Essentially, Ramakrishna is a power which will vitalize human life for ages to come. Ramakrishna the man was a partial demonstration of the universal power. By observing carefully the concrete illustrations of deep spiritual truths lived by the man, a sincere seeker can easily comprehend and utilize the power. That is why this book has been divided into two parts, the first presenting the man, and the second, the power.

It is self-evident that, in a dissertation of this nature, there are bound to be many phases which may disappoint and offend stunch devotees of

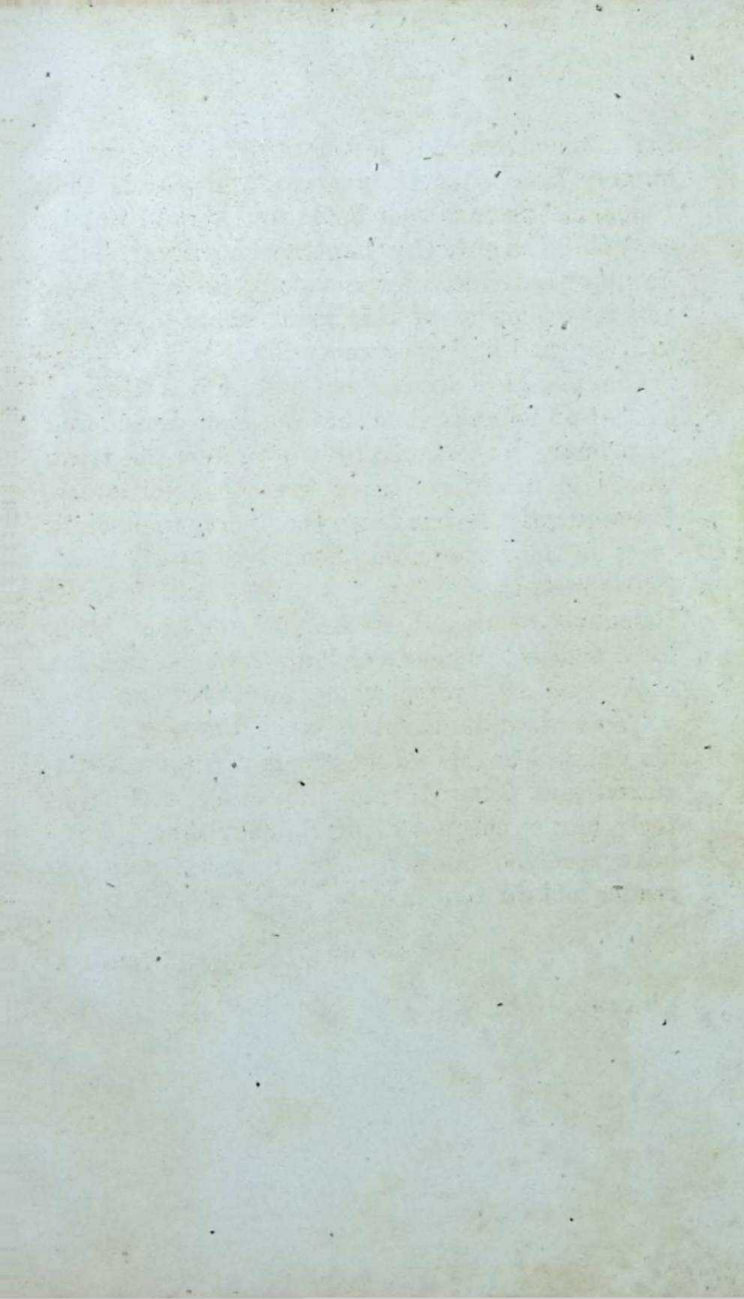
Sri Ramakrishna. Before them the author humbly kneels for forgiveness, and pleads that Ramakrishna is a vast book, and should not be considered as only the chapter which a particular group or individual has devotedly accepted. New and newer pages of this great volume are still to be opened and comprehended.

Chronological accuracy of events, in a life such as that of Ramakrishna, has not been considered of primary importance by the writer; the truth which it interprets is of greater significance. Consequently, he has taken the liberty to describe facts as they presented themselves to his idealized conception. Therefore, the historians of Ramakrishna should not look, in this small book, for a detailed sequence of happenings. There are other excellent works which fulfil that purpose.

Those were golden days when the writer and his devoted collaborators constantly talked, discussed and debated upon this essay, feeling in their hearts the power of Ramakrishna. They have received more than their mite; may the reader obtain his!

GNANESWARANANDA

Chicago, U. S. A.





SRI RAMAKRISHNA

RAMAKRISHNA THE MAN

I

When religious superstitions were beginning to be exposed by scientific investigations; when infallibility of authorities was severely challenged by man's advancing knowledge of the universe; consequently, when man began to grow suspicious regarding the existence of a God, soul or hereafter and clung desperately to the comforts of the body, bringing in contest, competition, exploitation, narrowness, arrogance and selfishness, the world needed a *man* who could prove in his life the potential divinity of man and his inseparable contact with the Divine Reality hidden to the ordinary senses; one who would establish a happy relation between the human faculties of man—his body, mind and feelings—and his deeper spiritual reality, in regard to himself and his fellow men. Undoubtedly such a man was Ramakrishna. His short but intense life of fifty years was lived as a protest against the principal superstitions of his age, and also as the fulfilment of the highest ideal of man in all ages, races and climes. Nowhere else can a modern find as clear a solution

of the deeper problems of his life as in the unique life and simple teachings of this simplest of men.

A modern stands absolutely puzzled and bewildered at the glamour of wealth and material resources, and considers such as the mark of success, happiness, culture, power and perfection. As a potent protest against such baseless superstitions of the modern age, Ramakrishna was born of parents who gave up their means of material comfort for the sake of truth. When a wealthy landlord asked Kshudiram Chattopadhyaya, the father of Ramakrishna, to bear false witness, the pious Brahmin proudly refused the mean offer and faced abject poverty and starvation, holding high the spiritual idealism of his lineage. Chandramani Devi, the ideal Hindu wife, fully shared the lofty idealism of her husband. In the village of Kamarpukur no neighbour or stranger could go without food, even though Chandramani would fast with a smile. With the heritage of such parents, in February, 1836, Ramakrishna was born in his remote, unspoiled village of India, about eighty-six miles from the modern city of Calcutta.

Little Gadadhar, as the child was called, grew up in an atmosphere of open intimacy with the villagers, who could hardly pass a day without feasting their senses on the soul-filling smile of Gadai. After being duly initiated at home by an age-old religious ceremony, which precedes a child's schooling, little Gadai was sent to the village school, carrying under his arm his straw mat to sit on and his modest lunch consisting of puffed rice and brown sugar, tied in the corner of his dhoti, or loin cloth. School work, learning the three R's, was not as interesting to Gadai as his recreation periods spent in the adjoining woods in company with his school mates.

Before proceeding very far with his adventure in traditional education, however, the sensitive mind of young Gadai discovered that the object of schooling was "to earn a few more handfuls of rice and an extra bunch of bananas". Gadai couldn't be induced to go to school any more, but he eagerly sought to learn the mysteries of life. One could see him drinking in every word of the village Kathak—story teller—as he narrated and sang the stories of the enlightened ones from ancient texts. Nothing escaped the reten-

tive memory of the little boy who could reproduce a whole religious opera with its music by hearing it only once. From these sources he gathered enough food for years of contemplation, and also cultivated an effective means for artistic expression.

Now Gadadhar's occupation became two-fold. For hours he would be missing from home and his companions. Every house, every playground would be searched by his eager playmates to find Gadai, without whom play lost all its zest, but he could be found nowhere. Gadai had discovered a place by the side of the winding brook off the pasture, where the village cremated its dead. Smashana, or the cremation ground, has always commanded an atmosphere of awe and reverence in Hindu stories. Here Mahadeva, the God of gods, meditates, smearing his body with the pure white ashes of renunciation. The Yogis seek the solitude of a Smashana to realize the vanity of worldly desires. The villagers are afraid to go there even in broad daylight, but brave Gadadhar used to spend many solitary hours either in deep meditation or in intimate communion with calm and beautiful nature. "What

is behind all this? Is there an all-pervading and all-loving God as the Kathak narrated? If so, why couldn't I see Him and talk to Him? Yes, didn't the Kathak tell the story of Dhruva to whom God appeared and spoke? If I love Him and meditate on Him, I can see God too." Thus a deep feeling for the realization of God grew stronger and stronger in the tender heart of the boy.

At other times, he was busy teaching the boys the dialogue and songs of an opera which he had memorized. The cool shade of the blossoming mango trees, the fragrance of the flowers overhead and all around, the humming of the bees and the twitter of the birds supplied the most marvellous stage-setting for the juvenile artists, united under the leadership of Gadai. The village eventually enjoyed many wonderful treats given by this band of young players. Gadai became dear to all. Men, women and children of every caste, rank and position loved him dearly. Love conquered all barriers of sex, age and social position. Though a mere child, Gadai learned to love humanity *for its own sake*. As a healthy boy reared on the lap of benign nature, loving

humanity and being loved by all, constantly feeding his intellect with the ancient lore of his race, through artistic medium, and also learning to give exquisite expression to what he spontaneously absorbed, Gadai received an education which made him the man he was destined to be. If later in life men with university degrees and world-wide reputation for scholarship sat at his feet like undeveloped children and marvelled at the wisdom, culture, refinement and spiritual glory of the illiterate Ramakrishna, it might be taken for a dramatic representation in his life of the highest ideal of education.

Besides dramatic art and singing, young Gadai showed unusual proficiency in doing many little things with his hands. He could make an image of Shiva with clay and give such an unearthly touch to his work that even a finished sculptor would stop to admire it. He could handle his brush and paint with equal skill, and finish a Chal Chitra—painting on the background of an image—with the ability of an adept.

Concerning many social customs and caste laws, Gadai was a rebel. At the age of ten he was given the holy Upavita, or sacred thread,

which a Brahmin wears over his left shoulder and under the right arm, as a badge of honour and distinction for his supreme social position. Following the ancient custom, Gadai was to beg his first meal after the ceremony from a respectable Brahmin lady, for whom it was a great honour. Gadai loves poor old Dhani, the village blacksmith's pious widow. He must beg his food from her. What sacrilege—a low class woman giving food to a newly initiated Brahmin lad! But Gadai triumphed in the teeth of opposition and criticism. He ate his first ceremonial meal from the loving hands of Dhani.

Kshudiram had died when Gadadhar was still a child, and a few other deaths had been witnessed by little Gadai. The mystical mind of the child was drawn toward the great enigma of life and death. He wanted to know the great unknown. He could look for hours at the autumn sky and watch the floating clouds leisurely drifting along. Soon the earth and sky would vanish entirely from his mind, and his little consciousness, like the "salt doll" of his subsequent parables, would dive deep into the ocean of the Infinite, melt, and become one with it. He would

lose all external sense perception and remain completely absorbed in a state of super-sensuous bliss. Such trances happened to come over him several times during his childhood. His relatives were horrified when they first discovered him in that state, thinking him to be either possessed or diseased. But otherwise the boy was quite normal, healthy and cheerful. These states and also other super-normal talents of the boy confirmed the conviction of the believing ones that Gadai was a God. Nevertheless, it was the opinion of all that he was unusual.

Days and years rolled on in the village of Kamarpukur. Little children grew up, and the old villagers he loved passed away. Life around him in all its phases became his sole curriculum. He nourished his body, mind and soul with the free bounties of rural India, where nature is untrimmed and unspoiled; where people are related to one another, if not by the stream of the same blood, yet by an even closer tie of mutual love and sympathy; where life is simple, contented and happy and people live for a higher purpose; where the fragrant air sings the melody of freedom; the sky, a shade bluer, showers bliss; the

nights, a shade darker, stimulate contemplation; and the foliage, a shade greener, arouses hope. Rural India still unspoiled by modernism retains the traditional culture of ancient India more than the large cities. Kamarpukur is such a village which even in 1936, a hundred years after the birth of Ramakrishna, is away from any electric wire, water pipe or railroad at least by thirty miles; where even today half the population has not seen an automobile, and yet the people are highly cultured, peaceful, vigorous and upright,

Ramakrishna was essentially a child of pure Indian culture. The highly formative period of his life was spent entirely in the atmosphere of India. This fundamental purity of his native culture was further preserved by his not being a reader of books—he was pure Indian culture in its finest and subtlest form. At the age of eighteen, when the foundation of his character was definitely formed, he came to live in Calcutta—"the London of the East." Ancient India comes to live in the midst of modernism—spirituality makes its home in the stronghold of material progress! We shall see how one reacts

upon the other. In the next period of the life of Ramakrishna we shall find another dramatic presentation, in the meeting of the spiritual culture of India with modern material civilization.

II

Ram Kumar, being the eldest son of Kshudiram, was the head and main support of the family. His wife had died, leaving a little boy, and he never married again. The second brother, Rameswar, had a wife and several children; and he also contributed his small earnings to the common fund. Ram Kumar had a fine education in Sanskrit, but the small village of Kamarpukur was not the place where the scholarly Brahmin could earn enough to support this large family. Calcutta, the capital of British India, was attracting scholars, professors, business men and labourers, from all parts of India, with the prospect of better opportunities. Ram Kumar at last came to this vast centre of modern culture, and opened a small school to teach Sanskrit to the children of those conservative high caste Hindus who were still reluctant to send their children to English schools. Owing to his ability as a teacher,

his school grew larger, making it impossible for him to take care of his students and attend to the many duties of housekeeping. He needed help, but was not rich enough to bring the family to the expensive city. Gadai, however, could come and attend to the household duties, and study at his school to be able, eventually, to help him in his teaching. Considering everything, mother Chandramani at last agreed; and Gadadhar came to live in Calcutta with his brother. One might as well put a skylark in a small cage and expect it to sing and soar! Away from open nature, far removed from the frank friendliness of human contact, the heart of Gadadhar became more hungry for the "unknown and the unknowable". Although he accommodated himself to the stiffness of city life with a cheerful smile, he became more meditative at heart, and wanted to grasp something more tangible, and lean on it like a baby in the loving arms of the mother. Did his tender heart miss the loving care of his mother, from whom he never had been separated before? Did the word mother arouse in him, more than ever, the idea of a universal all-loving mother, from whom one could never be

separated? He must have loved to think of God as his loving mother at this stage of his life. It must have been his eager, hungry heart which drew toward him a unique situation that was to bring fulfilment to his secret yearnings.

Rani Rashmani, a wealthy woman of great culture and religious devotion, spent a fortune to build a rather outstandingly non-sectarian temple on the bank of the Ganges, about five miles north of Calcutta. Very rarely one finds such a broadminded conception of a temple, in which four great deities like Kali the terrible, Krishna and Radha—beauty and love—and Shiva the good, are worshipped with equal devotion. Twelve temples of Shiva, standing in a line along the bank of the Ganges, guarding, like twelve vigilant sentries, the spirit of power, beauty and love, symbolized in the two inner temples of Kali and Radha-Krishna, were completed. The images were carved out, and the storehouses were all filled up with supplies. The Rani was eager to spend any amount to make her enterprise a unique success but, unfortunately, she belonged to a low caste so that no Brahmin would accept the post of temple priest under her. Even the

temptation of high remuneration, and an hereditary grant of extensive landed property, could not induce a single Brahmin to accept the Rani's offer. Should such a noble enterprise be absolutely ruined by the stubbornness of proud Brahmins? Was there no way by which, without subduing the traditional spirit of independence of Brahmins by wealth, the Rani could make her temple a real centre of spiritual culture, sought equally by high and low caste people?

The news reached the modest school of Ram Kumar, who found a solution for this momentous problem, which satisfied people of all ranks and castes. The Rani was highly pleased with the poor and unknown professor. She arranged the management of the temple according to his decision; and in appreciation, requested him to accept the post of the chief priest. Shortly, Ram Kumar closed his school, and came to live in the beautiful temple garden of Dakshineswar.

Having learnt to appreciate the wisdom of age-old tradition, Gadadhar was conservative; but above all he was a lover of truth. Before changing his old ways he would always consider the justice and truth behind a new idea, and view it

with the eye of an examiner. Once convinced, no amount of opposition could stop him from accepting such a new step. He heard all about the temple controversy, and was happy to know about the success of his brother in the matter. But, for himself, he wanted to decide after knowing things personally. He did not move to Dakshineswar with his brother, but visited the temple; enjoyed the atmosphere; spent the whole day, and part of the evening; ate food cooked by himself; and returned every night to Calcutta to sleep. After a few days of study he was convinced about the honesty of the intentions of his brother; and also found the place quite congenial to his taste, temperament and ideal. So, he finally decided to make the temple of Dakshineswar his home and heaven. The duty of decorating the stone image of Kali with flowers, leaves and sandal-wood paste in the morning, and costly jewelry and clothes in the evening, was given to him. Besides doing his allotted work with the skill of a finished artist, he would entertain the goddess with ecstatic songs which kept every listener spell-bound. Thus a strong yearning began to burn his heart with the desire to contact

the universal Divine Mother with all his senses. With hungry eyes he would look at the stone image of the terrible goddess, while tears of ecstasy would moisten his clothes.

There, on a pedestal of marble, is a hundred petalled lotus made of solid silver, symbolizing the diverse functions of human consciousness. Shiva, the infinite divine being, lies still and motionless across the lotus. He is beyond quality and action, hence white in colour. Making the blissful body of Shiva the arena of her action, Kali performs the dance of creation, preservation and destruction, with a mysterious smile on her beautiful face. Her long black hair floats in the air, and with raised sword she destroys the evil ones, holding by the second hand, the severed head of a demon. Her third and fourth hands are stretched out to shower bounties and blessings on the devotees. Blackness of ignorance is her complexion for those who see only the surface. She is fearlessness itself, and has nothing to hide under covers. She is the climax of beauty and has nothing to add by clothes. The ignorant are terrified by her appearance while the wise, meditating on her on the lotus of their hearts, enjoy heavenly bliss.

Kali dances her cosmic dance on every heart; the mystics enjoy the beauty of it while the cowards shiver at her steps. The Mother has many forms, beautiful as well as terrible. She is kindness and horror, love and anger, rest and action in one! Could the eager heart of a sincere worshipper feel her concrete manifestation within and without? Gadadhar must feed his hungry soul and senses with her concrete, living presence, or else what was the purpose of living—what was the meaning of religion, worship or rituals! Thus Ramakrishna demonstrated in his life the purpose of religion: Divine Reality, or God, must be contacted, here in this life, by these very senses; it must be one's constant source of inspiration, joy, peace and bliss. Rituals, creeds and yogas are only the methods!

Ram Kumar did not serve long in his new position for he died shortly afterwards, and Gadadhar succeeded him as the chief priest of Kali. The Rani and her son-in-law, Mathuranath, in course of their visits to the temple, did not fail to notice the unusual youth. They talked about him with high regard and appreciation, so that the occasion having arisen, they immediately

appointed the young assistant to the responsible position, arousing thereby some criticism and jealousy amongst the other priests and officers of the temple. Gadadhar started his services as the chief priest with increased eagerness at heart for the desired vision, which kept him intoxicated day and night. Often, starting to offer his invocation in the customary way—in Sanskrit—he could no longer check the tide of his feelings, and would burst out sobbing, like a child in agony, forget his dignified Sanskrit, and cry aloud in his provincial dialect, “Mother, how long must I wait; won’t you come and comfort your child?” The age-old ritual of worship would be replaced by a song from his heart, “Mother, here thy child cries in agony and thou dost not hear him. Is thy heart made of cold stone?” The services took a longer time than usual. The crowd standing outside would hear the priest cry and sing. Surely he has gone mad!

The matter was soon reported to the Rani, with a good deal of exaggeration; but she warned the complainants not to interfere with the actions of the young priest until she should come personally to visit the temple, and investigate. She once

paid a surprise visit to the temple, without Gadadhar knowing anything about it, and watched his entire procedure of worship. When the Rani came out of the temple there were tears of ecstasy in her eyes. She passed peremptory orders: "Let none disturb or interfere with the services of the young priest—those who do not like his method of worship are free to leave the temple—the young priest shall stay!" She later requested Gadadhar to sing some of his songs to the Mother. Slowly the music arose from the heart of the devotee, like a fountain of heavenly bliss it bathed his whole being with ecstasy. Once the Rani became unmindful; her mind wandered away to the thought of an important lawsuit. With a rude shock the melody was cut short, and Gadai left the place with utter pain and disgust, disregarding the Rani and insulting her. "Now the mad priest will reap the consequences," thought the jealous crowd, "he will be thrown out to his misery this very day." But the Rani's heart was full of remorse, that worldly thoughts could so influence her mind as to turn it away from the heavenly bliss which the young priest was so lavishly showering upon her. She asked the forgiveness

of the poor Brahmin, and left the temple, repeating with emphasis her previous order. That day the humble priest established a unique position for himself with Rani Rashmani, and her whole family.

Stories travelled to his people at Kamarpukur that Gadadhar had gone completely mad. Old mother Chandramani was worried, and wanted to see her beloved child and treat him. When Gadadhar arrived home, his relatives and the villagers were pleased to see that their Gadai was not the lunatic that they expected him to be. To the contrary, he was wiser, and more calm and composed than ever. His intense yearning for the vision of the universal Mother, however, was keeping him extremely tense and indrawn; he loved solitude. The love of a wife is believed to be the strongest motive force which can substitute, in a young mind, the love of God. Let the young man learn to love a young woman and his accumulated stream of love, now directed toward the "unattainable", will find a human channel of expression. His relatives began to search for a suitable bride in the neighbouring villages, but a desirable girl could not be found anywhere. The

family became worried, and mother Chandra was shedding many a tear for her boy. Gadai knew everything, but never said a word about the matter until his relatives had almost given up the quest. He then went to his mother and, in a prophetic mood, said, "Mother, my bride has come to the village of Jairambati as the daughter of Ram Chandra Mukhupadhyaya, go and find her." On inquiry it was discovered that Ram Chandra of Jairambati, a village about five miles from Kamarpukur, had a girl, beautiful, and desirable in every other respect, but that she was too young—only eight years old!

The prophecy of Gadadhar was eventually fulfilled, without his further interference in the matter, when his relatives finally settled the affair and Gadadhar Chattopadhyaya, then twenty-three years old, was married by solemn Hindu rites to Saradamani Devi, when only eight—a nuptial age for girls held in high esteem by ancient tradition, as conducive to mystical results. As was the custom in case of such solemnized betrothals, the little bride, after becoming acquainted with her future home and relatives, went back to live with her father.

Like various other facts in the life of Ramakrishna which dramatized many problems of the age, with their deepest and most far-reaching solutions, the marriage of Gadadhar and Sarada proved to be an enactment of the truest relation between man and wife. We shall discuss this point more fully after the reader has been acquainted with adequate facts regarding their lifelong unique married relations.

Gadadhar returned to Dakshineswar and resumed his office. His nominal marriage had no effect upon his intense yearning to see God, which only increased a hundredfold as time rolled on. Every evening, as the sun was setting, he would lament in heart-rending agony, and throw himself flat on the pavement and rub his face against the rough stone crying, "Mother, another day of my life is gone and still thou hast not granted me thy vision. How long—O how long wilt thou keep me waiting like this!" One day when he was alone in the temple offering worship, the craving rose to such a height that he took hold of a sharp weapon that hung on the wall, and was about to kill himself to end that unbearable agony of his heart. A strong hand snatched the

deadly weapon and he was held in a loving embrace. The touch cooled his whole system; a current of unprecedented joy surged through him. His body, mind and spirit were transformed by a magnetic influence. There, in front of him, stood the radiant form of the Divine Mother, feeding his entire being with the heavenly ambrosia of her loving smile. The starved soul received its desired nourishment; the burning heart was anointed with the healing unction of God-vision!

Services in the temple could no longer be conducted by him in the customary ceremonial way. The intimacy of direct vision of the Mother threw all formalities away. He was seen eating from the dish offered to the Deity, or lying on the bed intended for the Goddess. Many such acts, sacrilegious to ordinary understanding, were the daily conduct of the "mad priest." The Rani again came to visit the temple. She understood perfectly the condition of the love-intoxicated worshipper, and granted him absolute freedom from the ritualistic duties of the temple. Another priest was given the duties of the ceremonial worship, while the young mystic could enter the

temple at any time he pleased, and do whatever he desired. Provision was made for all his material needs and, in addition, his regular salary was sent to his family at home. The Rani fully realized the financial condition of his people, and was eager to help them further by making an endowment for their maintenance. But the young priest could not be induced to accept any such gift. However, the Rani remained, as long as she lived, the custodian of the love-intoxicated child of the Divine Mother. At her death, her son-in-law Mathuranath became the sole administrator of her vast estate.

Mathur Babu, unlike his mother-in-law, belonged to the new school of thinking. He was educated in the English university of Calcutta, and was absolutely saturated with the rising scientific rationalism of the age. Although he was fascinated by the unique simplicity and strength of character of the young priest, it took Mathur some time to accept the spiritual truth demonstrated in the life of Ramakrishna. However, a very wonderful relation began to develop between the two, which culminated in a complete surrender of Mathur to the untutored spiritual

wisdom of Ramakrishna, resulting in the former becoming more humane, patient, enduring, and even stronger and more practical in his business life.

Everything was now favourable for Gadadhar to enter into his eager and absolutely unprecedented experiments with spiritual truths. For twelve long years, he remained constantly absorbed in a series of spiritual practices, before coming out to illumine the world with the unique results of his amazing personal experiences. The temple gardens covered a vast area of land, some of which was quite wild and solitary, so that, like the Rishis of old, our modern seer of truth did not have to go to the heights of the Himalayas to find a suitable place for his meditations. The beautiful suburb of a populous city like Calcutta received the honour of being the site of his rigorous, spiritual practices. He did not have to go into the extremes of asceticism in regard to his lodging, food and clothes. A beautiful large room, having no other furniture than his clean and comfortable bed, overlooking the sacred waters of the Ganges, enlivened by a continual traffic of steam and other boats, was his constant

home for about thirty years. The loving care of Mathuranath not only kept him above any interference from the temple officials, but also supplied him with everything which he or his attendants and associates needed. During this period, first his nephew Hridoy, and later his wife Saradamani, were the watchful sentries of his physical health and comfort.

Thus Ramakrishna demonstrated to the world that meaningless mortification of the physical instrument, arrogant austerity and vain asceticism, are not necessary steps leading to spiritual perfection. It was his sincere yearning for the truth, which not only guided his steps regarding such non-essentials, but also drew toward him qualified teachers, and other requisites, for his unique life of Sadhana, or practice. In matters concerning religion, the modern world is suffering from undue emphasis on non-essentials—what to eat, how to dress, what amount of water to use for baptism, etc., etc.—and almost total neglect of the essentials. The life of Ramakrishna, in all its details, is the most powerful object-lesson for those who want to know the real truth regarding such questions.

Ramakrishna wanted to find out for himself if the various paths, methods, Yogas and creeds prescribed by the different religious systems of the world, led to direct realization of God. He had already attained the highest manifestation of absolute sincerity and whole-hearted yearning, which formed the necessary groundwork for his diverse practices. But he must have qualified Gurus, or guides, who have arrived at the highest state of realization by following their own special methods. Like a child he turned to his Divine Mother for help.

Shortly there came Bhairavi Brahmini, a young woman mystic, who understood the high spiritual state of Ramakrishna while others considered him mad. She demonstrated her theories before an assembly of renowned scholars and mystics, gathered together through the influence of Mathur, and declared boldly that Ramakrishna was equal in spiritual status to great saints like Buddha, Shankara or Sri Chaitanya—that he was a huge dynamo of spiritual power!

Then started a series of mystical practices to which the Brahmini initiated Ramakrishna; and, to the amazement of the teacher, the student

attained to the highest pinnacle of success within the shortest possible time. For six years, days and nights were passed in ecstatic visions, beatific experiences, and transformations of body, mind and spirit by the power of divine love.

For a time Ramakrishna superimposed upon his consciousness the state of Radha, the Gopi girl in love with Krishna, as described in the ancient texts. So complete was the realization of that mystic love, in the mind of the devotee, that, not only was his consciousness in perfect at-onement with Radha's, but his physical body underwent complete transformation. Ramakrishna became a woman. As he dressed like a woman during that period, even his close friends could not recognize him as their own Gadadhar. This, and certain other amazing facts in the life of Ramakrishna, open up new avenues for scientific investigation regarding the relation of body, mind and spirit.

Chandra Devi, the mother of Ramakrishna, was getting old, and desired, like all pious Hindus, to leave her mortal body by the side of the sacred waters of the Ganges. She came to live with her beloved son, at Dakshineswar, while he was still

going through his mystic practices. Mathuranath received the old lady with great respect, and wanted to arrange a suitable lodging for her. "No," said Chandra Devi, "I can live comfortably in that unused tower, from where I can look at mother Ganges, and also watch my son Gadai coming in and out of his room." So the round interior of the second storey of the small concert tower, about eight feet in diameter, was equipped for the lodging of Ramakrishna's saintly mother. Once Mathur came to see her, and thought he might induce her to accept the endowment which the Rani, his mother-in-law, wished to settle on the family. "Mother," said Mathur, "you are a Brahmin lady, living as my guest. It is only customary that I make a gift to you for granting me this honour. Won't you accept something from me?" "Oh, certainly, yes, you are so good to me," said the contented lady, "but I cannot think just now what I want! Ask me some other time." Mathur came the following day and reminded her about the gift. "Oh yes, my son, I discovered that I ran out of the spice I use with my *pan* leaf, please get me a nickel's worth of 'mashala'!"

The pious old lady lived in that small room,

constantly absorbed in a blissful state of mind, until her divine soul, freed from the limitations of the physical body, became one with the Infinite. Gadadhar, in the midst of a cyclonic spiritual state of mind, which made him forget even his own body, shed tears at the bereavement of his mortal mother.

Let us now return to the young bride of Gadadhar, who was living all these years at her father's home, paying occasional visits to her mother-in-law at Kamarpukur. Once only, when she was about fourteen, did Saradamani see her husband during a visit of Gadadhar to his people. This second meeting left such a deep impression of his purity, love and saintliness on the young mind of Sarada, that, during subsequent years of separation, whenever diverse stories travelled to her ears regarding the insane condition of the young priest of Dakshineswar, she was able to throw off such gossip, and meditate in her mind on the ideal husband whom she so secretly cherished in her heart. These meditations contributed to her character that patience, endurance and selfless love, which made her the universal mother she was to be. Saradamani was deter-

mined to be near the idol of her meditations.

Here, at Dakshineswar, Gadadhar, remaining completely lost to the external world, like an inspired scholar totally absorbed in his work of scientific research, was making experiment after experiment to verify superscientific truths. The great heroes of the religious epics of his country supplied him with various conceptions of spiritual ideals, and examples of mystical experiences. He was determined to try them all. Like the mysterious Brahmini who came to Dakshineswar, from where nobody knew, experienced teachers came of their own accord to initiate and guide this sincere seeker in the mysteries of different spiritual practices.

Whenever Ramakrishna accepted a method he followed it in form as well as in spirit. To experience the ecstasy of the love of Radha, we have seen him transformed completely into a woman. When he experienced the active devotional servitude of Hanumana—the monkey mystic of the Ramayana—he ate like a monkey, acted like a monkey and was constantly absorbed in the thought of Rama, his divine master. At another time he was the mother of Ram Lala, or child

Rama. The vision of the sweet child was constantly with him, during this period. As the mother, he fed the baby, rocked him to sleep, bathed him and did everything that a mother does for her dear little child. Thus, in form and spirit he realized the highest ecstasy of mother-love, directed to God.

Then came Totapuri, the great Vedantic mystic, who initiated him as a Sannyasin, or Vedantic monk, teaching him how to merge his limited self into the Absolute. Ramakrishna mastered the secret of the pure monistic state of bliss, known as Nirvikalpa Samadhi, in three days, to attain which his great Guru had laboured for forty long years. It was Totapuri who gave him the name Ramakrishna, by which he was to be worshipped all over the world. A Sannyasin is a free soul, severed from the tie of family relations, caste-laws and all other conventions, creeds, duties, forms and even memories. Gadadhar, the son of Kshudiram and Chandramani, was forgotten for ever. Rama and Krishna—truth and love—two great God incarnations of Hindu mythology, with their spiritual greatness combined in one, were manifested in Ramakrishna of Dakshineswar.

Even when going through rigid practices in order to realize the impersonal and absolute conception of the Brahman of Vedanta, his direct contact with God the Mother was so vivid that he had to struggle very hard to go beyond it. Totapuri, who was firmly fixed in the realization of the impersonal, did not understand his saintly pupil when he talked intimately about the Divine Mother. Tota had no use for temples, images or rituals, and never even went inside the temple precincts. He stayed near-by, in the Panchavati (a grove of five specific trees, generally believed to command a special mystic atmosphere), which Ramakrishna had planted according to the direction of some ancient text. Tota wore no clothes, and was never governed by any social or religious convention. Although he did not quite like the childish sentimentality of his brilliant disciple, in his attitude towards the 'personal', Tota did not disturb him, except on one occasion, when Ramakrishna was quite unable to banish from his consciousness the loving presence of the Mother. But the personal contact remained vividly with Ramakrishna, even after he attained the highest state of Samadhi, or total absorption of the

individual consciousness into the infinite. This sweet human touch of spiritual mysticism gave Ramakrishna a broad and sympathetic attitude towards life, which his Guru looked down upon with a smile of proud condescension. Sorrow, suffering and death were nothing but foolish illusions to Totapuri; whereas, with Ramakrishna, they were the terrible aspect of the Mother. However, the uncompromising ascetic, which Tota was, at last realized the truth of the personal conception of Shakti, or Power, under the influence of his disciple. Soon after, he disappeared from Dakshineswar, never to be heard of again.

Having realized the ultimate state of complete union with Brahman, in Nirvikalpa Samadhi, there was nothing more to be attained by Ramakrishna. The other paths prescribed by all the known mystical methods, belonging to all different schools of Hindu philosophy, had already been successfully followed by him. He had found out that opinions, creeds and rituals were paths suited to different tastes, temperaments and aptitudes, leading to the same goal of direct communion with God. He was now ready to make

his experiments with non-Hindu creeds, and find out if they too led to the same goal. He soon contacted a devout Christian mystic, born of a stock of orthodox Hindus. With his assistance Ramakrishna now started to meditate on the Christ. Very soon he had the vision of the Son of Man, who, in the form of a stream of light, entered into him, filling his body, mind and soul with an ecstasy of bliss. For a time he was unable to think of Hindu deities, but on his fervent appeal to the Divine Mother, this condition was soon removed.

He had made the same kind of experiment with the religious mysticism of Islam. He was duly initiated by a Mohammedan mystic, and lived the life of the strictest of Mohammedan devotees in regard to food, clothes and opinion. Though he found many differences between popular Hinduism and Mohammedanism, yet all disagreements of the paths faded away in his final realization of the "one God of Islam".

Making his experiments in all the prominent religious mysticism of the world, Ramakrishna discovered their underlying truth. "They are so many ways, like a stairway, an elevator, a rope

or a ladder, to reach the top floor. People quarrel about the way because they are ignorant and are not eager to go to the top." During the subsequent years of his life he occupied such a unique position that orthodox believers of diverse religious creeds could always see in him the most perfect manifestation of their own spiritual ideals. He was a Siddha Kaula of a Shakta, an illumined Goswami of a Vaishnava, a Paramahansa of a Vedantist, an enlightened Pir of a Mohammedan, and an inspired Saint of a Christian. In fact, in the diagram of religious paths, he occupies the position of the centre into which all the radii, travelling from distant points in the circumference, merge into oneness. Ramakrishna solved the problems of religious dogmatism on the one hand, and scepticism on the other, for the whole world, irrespective of race, nationality or creed. He is the most direct and convincing answer to all questions concerning religion. He is a tremendous force which the modern world needs and must necessarily accept!

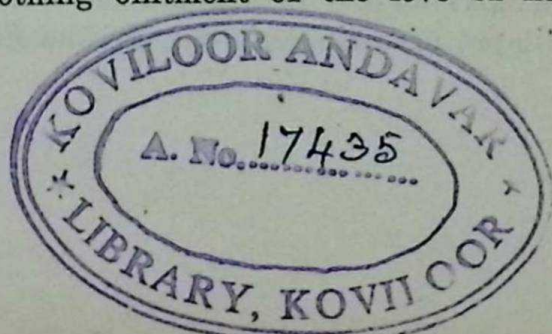
Once during this period, holding a lump of clay in one hand and a silver coin in the other, Ramakrishna contemplated on the value of money.

“Why do people consider a coin of greater value than this lump of clay? Why, in their attraction for this round piece of engraved metal, do they forget God, peace, goodness and love! Yes, it buys them the comfort and power they desire. But what are comfort and power good for if they do not lead toward the abiding bliss of God-realization?” Addressing the coin, he continued, “Money, instead of being a means to real happiness and bliss, thou hast become the goal, creating jealousy and hatred, war and destruction. I do not consider thee any more valuable than this lump of clay, so I throw thee into the water as I throw this piece of earth!” Thenceforward he could never touch a coin, although he gladly accepted gifts brought to him by his many admirers and devotees, when there was no other motive than pure love and devotion behind them.

Is there any deep symbolism behind this unique and dramatic rite of the great Mystic? We leave it to the thoughtful reader to meditate on. There is no doubt, however, that the salvation of the greedy modern world lies in its revaluation of money!

Towards the end of the second period of his

life, when he was in his early thirties, a very significant event happened which has a much deeper meaning, for the guidance of humanity all over the world, than is usually understood: Saradamani, the so long-forgotten and neglected wife, came to live at Dakshineswar with her saintly husband. She took an unusually bold step for a young village girl, when at the age of eighteen she finally decided to go on a pilgrimage to the Ganges with a group of other pilgrims. But, undoubtedly, it was not so much the ceremonial bath in the holy waters which her burning heart needed as it was the desired contact with the ideal of her long meditations. She journeyed on foot the entire way, was even waylaid by a robber when, one evening, owing to sheer exhaustion, she could no longer keep pace with her companions. But her all-conquering love, which she so patiently cultivated during her years of longing at home, won the heart of the cruel robber, who escorted her to Dakshineswar. Her physical body received its ceremonial bath in the sacred waters of the Ganges, but her soul craved for the soothing ointment of the love of her husband.



Ramakrishna received his wife with great tenderness and love. He treated the robber-escort with genuine friendliness and appreciation, establishing a life-long relationship with him. The small concert tower was given to Saradamani for her quarters. Ramakrishna repeatedly regretted the fact that she had not come when Mathur was living—he had died shortly before—for he would have established her in queenly comfort. This loving tenderness of her saintly husband was enough to make up for any rigorous disadvantages which Saradamani might have to face under her present living conditions.

The mother of Ramakrishna had been an old lady when she lived there, and, as such, was free to go about but it was quite different for young Saradamani, for whom social custom demanded that she should not be seen by any man except her intimate relatives. Before sunrise she had to finish her morning bath and return to her ascetic's cell to spend the whole day and the greater part of the evening in expectation of a visit to the God of her heart, who was so near and yet so far. Her hungry eyes would catch an occasional glimpse of their desired nourishment whenever

Ramakrishna came out of his room and walked toward the Panchavati. At night, when the rest of the people were in bed, she could come to the room of her husband and spend some time doing little things for him and listening to his words of love and wisdom. Owing to the tremendous pressure on his body during the years of rigorous practices, Ramakrishna's health had become quite delicate and he needed special diet. Saradamani lovingly prepared his food in her own quarters and brought it to her husband. These daily services gave her more opportunities to be near him. They were glorious moments in the life of this exceptional wife, whose soul was constantly being filled up by the growing appreciation of the powerful love of her husband. A bridge of fulfilment was being firmly established between her soul and that of her beloved Lord, in which the body was an unnecessary instrument.

From the very beginning, Ramakrishna, by his mystic vision, discovered in his wife a special manifestation of Divine Power. Her tender love and solicitous care would protect his body and mind from all dangers, and inspire his soul with immeasurable power. She would bring unex-

pected fulfilment to his Mission, even when his mortal body would be gone. By their present contact a divine mystic relation became confirmed between the two. From ancient times sages have declared man and wife to be one soul having two bodies. To realize such a mystic state in love has been the aim and ideal of Hindu marriage. Saradamani fully saw a Divine Force making use of the body and mind of her husband. The Divine Mother spoke through him, acted through him and felt through him. Saradamani learnt to love that Divine Mother in her husband. Ramakrishna likewise discovered the same Basic Power in the person of his wife, so that it became absolutely clear to both that the One Divine Principle was making use of their two bodies to serve a great purpose. Thus there was complete union between the two.

To complete such a conviction Ramakrishna once performed a mystic ritual. One night he invited young Saradamani to his room, where an elaborate preparation was made for a ceremonial worship. When she entered the room she naturally thought that her husband needed her assistance for a special worship of Kali. But it was

not Kali the terrible that Ramakrishna wanted to worship; Shorashi, the beautiful Divine Power, was the Goddess of his adoration that night. He requested Saradamani to wear all the ornaments and clothes to be offered to the Goddess. Both were equally inspired by the ceremony. With heavenly dignity, grace and radiance, she occupied the throne of the Goddess, and remained absorbed in a state of divine bliss, while the ecstatic worshipper offered his Puja, sang the hymns to the Deity, and finally entered into Samadhi. The two souls became one, never to be separated again. A new consciousness awakened in Saradamani. Thenceforth she was the universal Holy Mother!

Thus ended the second chapter of the unique life of Ramakrishna. During the next period, of about fifteen years, he was the instrument for propagating the truths that were so vividly expressed in his character. The beautiful lotus of his life, full of an inexhaustible supply of spiritual nectar, had bloomed, attracting bees from all around.

The history of the ministry of Ramakrishna is another highly significant drama, which the modern aggressive world should study thoroughly

to be convinced of how truth makes its way, not by propaganda and criticism, but by the spirit of universal love and service. Ramakrishna did not establish a church or a society, yet hundreds of temples and societies are being built, all over the world, in his hallowed memory. He would never permit anyone to call him Guru, Father or Reverend, yet his godly influence has awakened millions of souls, bringing them peace and happiness. His modest bedroom at Dakshineswar became a centre of spiritual power which attracted men and women of all ranks and religions, creating a high tide in the subdued stream of the spiritual life of the world.

III

Mathuranath was perhaps the first person whose life-current was vitally changed by the direct and indirect power of Ramakrishna. But did Mathur accept Ramakrishna without first putting him to severe test? Did he worship him without having direct experiences regarding his godliness? Mathur was not a specimen of the believing type of humanity that accepts everything through faith. He had Ramakrishna examined

by modern doctors as well as by experienced Hindu physicians. Ho arranged for him to appear before assemblies of holy men and mystic philosophers to be thoroughly convinced about the genuineness of the mystic's spiritual experiences. Mathur went so far as to put him under temptation, hiring beautiful dancing girls to entice him. But looking at the girls the mystic smiled and said, "Mother Divine, do you think you can fool your child by wearing that mask of a nautch girl?" The girls were made to realize their inner Divinity as long as Ramakrishna was present amongst them, and even afterwards the memory of the experience never failed to arouse higher spiritual feelings in their hearts.

Mathur would fearlessly argue with Ramakrishna to uphold his so-called rationalism, but the latter, with a winning smile of calm determination, simply stated his own personal observations on the subject: "God is bound by the natural laws," argued Mathur, "even though He created nature. He cannot make a white hibiscus bloom on this plant, which produces only red." "God is omnipotent; if it pleases the Mother She can change all natural laws. This plant *can* pro-

duce a white flower if She so desires it." The next morning Mathur entered the room of Ramakrishna with a branch of the same hibiscus, which he had broken from the bush. To the surprise of Mathur, and the joy of Ramakrishna, there were two beautiful freshly opened blossoms on the same branch—one blood-red, the other snow-white! The heart of Mathur accepted the teaching of his master without further doubt.

Thinking of Ramakrishna, Mathur's mind became deeply occupied with the question, "Could Divinity fully manifest through the finite mind and frail body of a human being? Should he worship God in the form of a man?" Alone in his own quarters, he remained long absorbed in contemplation. Once he raised his head and, looking vacantly towards the room of Ramakrishna, saw him walking up and down on the verandah, for sometime facing west toward the Ganges, looking at the Shiva temples, then turning east in the direction of the temple of Kali. Mathur was watching the mystic in his habitual promenade. There could be no mistake that it was his beloved teacher; yet, when the figure turned east, toward the Kali temple, it was Kali

Herself, in the form of a beautiful dark young girl; when it turned around and faced the Shiva temples, it was the living form of the great white God! Mathur watched the mystery for a long time. This amazing revelation of the truth dispelled the clouds of doubt, fixing for ever his relation with his Guru.

Although Mathur was not much of a mystic, being of a very active type of practical business man, he once had the curiosity to experience the state of Samadhi, or ecstasy of God-consciousness. He asked his teacher to put him in that state, to which Ramakrishna replied, "You will have it in due course of unfoldment." "No, I want it now," insisted the impatient seeker. Ramakrishna, as he was becoming absorbed in meditation, placed his hand on the head of Mathur. Then slowly the teacher touched the entranced devotee at the base of the spine, gradually raising his magnetic fingers upward to the head. Mathur was in a deep state of meditation, enjoying divine bliss. Even after he came out of his meditation he was in constant touch with an inner joy, which kept him almost intoxicated day and night. Active Mathuranath was unable to en-

dure such a condition. He asked his preceptor to put him back into his former state. Smilingly the mystic agreed, reminding the student that he must wait, and gradually unfold by working out his Karma, to be able to fully enjoy Samadhi.

Ramakrishna's method of imparting spiritual enlightenment to his followers was absolutely unique and quite unprecedented in the annals of spiritual mysticism of all races and religions. His was the most accurate, direct and advanced scientific method, which only a past-master of spiritual science and art could effectively apply. Fundamentally, he was the most exact diagnostician of all the spiritual geniuses who have lived on our earth. His keen mystic insight penetrated into the inner potentiality of every disciple, revealing to his searching vision the deeply hidden subconscious, accumulated and carried through a series of previous incarnations. Consequently he never taught the same standardized process to any two devotees. Each soul must be helped to unfold its Divinity according to its individual taste, temperament, calibre and previous assets. Neither did he preach a prepared sermon nor enforce a pet set of forms, creeds, conduct or rituals. In

every seeker he saw God instead of "the sinner". Therefore, in helping each disciple, he was worshipping his own Divine Mother with rich varieties of offerings in the form of his spiritual teachings. Thus teaching was not a profession or occupation with him, it was a spontaneous outpouring of the gigantic spiritual power which had accumulated in him during the years of mystic practices.

Ramakrishna never argued, but he clearly demonstrated the truth and sent it directly to the heart of the receiver. He himself was the most vivid and concrete illustration of his teachings. Moreover, he had the most miraculous power of convincing the mind, and transforming the consciousness of those he chose, by a mere glance or a touch. Yet he was careful not to interfere with the natural growth and unfoldment of a person by using his great power indiscriminately.

Above all, Ramakrishna was a superb artist. Whatever he said or did was an expression of beauty itself. Day after day, for twelve years or more, visitors and eager seekers of truth filled his modest bedroom from early morning till late at night. Ramakrishna the artist kept the hearts of his audience enthralled and captivated,

as he presented before them the entire drama of life—its comedy and tragedy, smiles and tears, leading toward the finale, the mystic union of the finite self with the Infinite—in a continuous performance, containing within it the most original similes, stories and parables, the most exquisite wit and humour, artful mimicry and constructive caricatures, interspersed with melodious songs, occasionally leading to graphic pantomime or graceful dances, coming from the depth of his feelings, and culminating in the absolute stillness of his body, mind and spirit, in the bliss of Samadhi, when the great voice of Silence spoke with tremendous power to the innermost soul of his audience.

A huge forest fire cannot remain unnoticed for very long. The all-embracing spiritual fire of Ramakrishna's heart was soon discovered by the prominent members of the Brahma Samaj, a powerful socio-religious organization in India, established more than a century before that time by Raja Rammohan Roy. The Samaj consisted mostly of men and women who had received the highest English education and were thoroughly inspired by the western ideals of thinking and

living. It abolished caste, educated women, reformed the system of marriage, and protested against the worship of images. In contradistinction to the old-fashioned Hindu temples dedicated to different gods and goddesses, the Brahmo Samaj built many modern places of worship, with well-furnished lecture halls, and chapels dedicated to Brahma, the one impersonal God. They held regular services during which the Acharya, or the pastor, delivered a sermon. During the latter half of the nineteenth century the Brahmo Samaj could count among its members many of the best sons and daughters of India. But it was, perhaps, a little over-enthusiastic in its wholesale acceptance of the social and cultural ideals of Europe, while entirely disregarding the true strength of the dilapidated-looking ancient structure of Hindu culture and religion. When Ramakrishna, the true son of pure Indian culture, established an intimate relation with the refined, reformed and modernized Brahmo Samajists of Calcutta, a very significant drama was enacted, which was to direct the future thought-current of awaking India. The effect, as is the case in a combination of any two great forces, was one of

mutual benefit. From all his cultured friends Ramakrishna spontaneously absorbed much information regarding western science and art, which he effectively used in his illustrations and similes. His broad and receptive mind appreciated the contributions of modernism, and willingly accepted them, bringing into revelation the hidden spiritual current behind all arts and sciences. Contrary to the custom of other religious leaders he went to a modern theatre to enjoy the performance of a play. For him it was a vigorous stimulation to his love for God which kept him absorbed in an ecstasy of bliss. His presence in the auditorium exercised such a magnetic influence that the play was a unique success. After the performance he was surrounded by the producer, and the actors and actresses who were filled with an inspiration which brought a new spiritual light into their profession. Gladly could he take a trip to the Maidan, or playground of Calcutta, to see a balloon-flight, which only ignited his inner spiritual fire so that he had to be escorted home in deep Samadhi.

It was suggested to him by the elegant Samajists to take a little more care of his clothes when

appearing in public. He was criticized, in a friendly way, for using words which might be considered undignified by an outsider hearing him for the first time, but which were absolutely inoffensive to those who understood him. Nevertheless the journals of the Samaj gave him effective modern publicity, which eventually drew to him his most intimate disciples, whose efforts were to make it possible for the different countries and races of the world to hear about this great man, destined to become an international figure.

By the living illustration of Ramakrishna, the Samaj, on the other hand, was made to realize the true strength, beauty and depth of pure Indian spiritual culture; this again was a great factor in turning the tide of Indian national life. Amongst the great leaders of the Samaj, Keshab Chandra Sen, the great scholar and orator of international fame, who stormed England by his eloquent exposition of philosophy, winning thereby recognition and honour from Queen Victoria, was a very intimate friend and follower of Ramakrishna. Another prominent figure of the Samaj was Vijoy Krishna Goswami, whose life was so changed by

the influence of Ramakrishna that he reconverted himself into orthodox Vaishnavism, the faith of his ancestors, and attained to a state of high spiritual unfoldment. Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, the illustrious father of the world-renowned poet, was also a friend and admirer of the saint of Dakshineswar. Pandit Shivnath Shastri and Pratap Chandra Mazumdar, two great scholars and leaders of the Samaj, have left wonderful accounts of their memorable contacts with the illiterate priest of Kali. Amongst other famous men of India who contacted Ramakrishna and remained life-long admirers of this unlettered Brahmin, the names of Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and Doctor Mohendralal Sarkar must be mentioned with due regard. However, it is a very remarkable fact that when people began to know about Ramakrishna, he was first silently worshipped as an incarnation of God by many orthodox and saintly Hindus, who represented the best of ancient Indian spiritual culture. Then he was accepted as a great man by the westernized Brahmo Samajists, who demonstrated their appreciation in an open and public way by presenting Ramakrishna to their followers

in socio-religious gatherings, and also by writing about him in their journals. Then came a third group, consisting of young school and college boys, which became his intimate disciples, gradually evolving, under the influence of the Master, into a new type, which combined the best of the previous two. Is the future world to witness the advent of a new type of humanity, by a harmonious blending of the spirituality of India and the practical efficiency of the West? The work of Ramakrishna with his disciples was undoubtedly a miniature demonstration of such an ideal.

The membership register of the Brahmo Samaj contained, along with the list of its celebrities, the name of an insignificant young school boy, Narendranath Dutta. Naren was young, handsome, upright, fearless and of an artistic temperament. Though his frank, fearless and unconventional conduct might shock anybody at first sight yet, behind his beautiful big brown eyes, there was a tender kindness which could win the most stubborn of hearts. He was a dynamic debator, a soul-stirring singer and an original thinker. He once went for a private interview with Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, and embar-

rassed the famous leader by asking him, "Sir, have you seen God?" The sweet and complimentary words of the Maharshi, which he received in answer to his direct question, failed to satisfy him. Narendranath was determined to find someone who could answer, *yes*; otherwise he would prove that all religions were nothing but "frothy nonsense". Trying in vain his question on many leaders of different religions, he at last discovered the man who puzzled him by the simplicity and naturalness of his answer in the clearest affirmative. Narendranath was united for ever with Ramakrishna.

Ram Chandra Dutta, a relative of Narendranath, was a great admirer and devotee of Ramakrishna. The Master was once invited to visit Ram Chandra at his Calcutta home. After much hesitation, for fear that the wild and unconventional conduct of his nephew might shock the saint, Ram at last asked Naren to come and sing for his holy guest. At the party Naren sang with a feeling which he never experienced before. The Mystic remained absorbed in deep Samadhi, and every heart felt a keen yearning for the vision of God. At the end the Master thanked Naren,

asked a few questions regarding his home and family, and extended an invitation to the young man to visit the beautiful temple garden of Dakshineswar. Naren, who had already heard many things about the holy man, had now seen enough of him to decide, "He is queer, but very sweet—I am going to visit him". So, he went to Dakshineswar with a few friends, and returned home absolutely puzzled at the mysterious conduct of the holy man, who had called him aside and, amidst profuse tears, told him that he had been eagerly waiting for him all those years, that Naren was an ancient Rishi born on earth to remove the misery of mankind. "What could all this mean?" thought Narendranath, "Is he mad? But his conduct, except when he spoke to me in private, was absolutely normal."

The second time Naren came alone. Ramakrishna was sitting on his small day bed, and Naren was asked to sit beside him. Suddenly the Mystic touched his body with a magnetic power, and a unique state of consciousness rapidly overpowered him. The whole universe, together with his ego, was merging into an all-encompassing mysterious oneness! Naren was afraid and cried

out, "What is it you are doing to me?" Ramakrishna laughed quietly, and touching the chest of Naren with a gentle stroke, put him back into his normal state, remarking, "All right, it will come in time." Naren now began to feel an irresistible attraction towards the mysterious holy man. But he was on his guard, and determined not to give him any chance of exerting a similar influence on him, when he came for the third visit. But this time the Mystic changed his tactics and took Naren for a walk in the adjacent garden where, by a single, gentle touch, he put Naren into a state of hypnotic sleep, and extracted from his subconscious the fascinating story of who he had been in his previous incarnations, and the mission he came to fulfil in this life. The account given by Naren in his trance tallied exactly with what Ramakrishna had seen in a vision about his foremost disciple, long before he met him. After this incident, the details of which were never revealed to Naren, a unique relationship gradually developed between the two resulting in a tremendous spiritual unfoldment in Narendranath, which eventually made him the world-renowned spiritual leader of Young India.

Another great soul, about whom Ramakrishna had a mystic vision, had already come. The Holy Mother, who was living all this time in her little room in the concert tower, in spite of the realization of the universal Mother-Power within herself, sometimes longed for a human child. Ramakrishna had a vision that the Holy Mother was nursing a beautiful baby boy, who was to be his spiritual successor. He related it to his holy consort, making her exceedingly happy. When Rakhal Chandra Ghosh, a young boy in his teens, first came to Dakshineswar, the mystic insight of the Master at once recognized in him his spiritual son. That relation became firmly established between the three, culminating in Rakhal's unfoldment of a unique spiritual distinction amongst the group of young disciples. In fact, "Rakhal Maharaj" subsequently occupied the throne of adoration left vacant by the uncrowned spiritual emperor of modern India!

That spiritual geniuses are not necessarily born of distinguished parents, occupying high rank and social position, was clearly demonstrated in Latu, another young disciple of the Master. Latu was the so-called uncultured, unlettered, modest boy-

servant of Ram Chandra Dutta, but Ramakrishna soon discovered the great potential spirituality of the little boy and accepted him as his disciple and constant attendant. Later, by his spiritual enlightenment and saintly life, Latu proved to be the greatest miracle performed by Ramakrishna.

Baburam Ghosh, a school boy, was considered by Ramakrishna as having once been a Gopi with Krishna in Brindavan. As he came under the loving influence of the Master his inherent Prema, or divine love, flowed like the holy waters of the Ganges, eventually quenching the spiritual thirst of thousands of men and women. By his all-embracing love Baburam demonstrated the universality of his Master's mission.

In rapid succession, during the years 1880-81, came a dozen other intimate devotees about whom Ramakrishna had previous mystic visions. Shashi and Sarat had been with the Christ in a previous incarnation, and now they were going to be two gigantic pillars of the mission of Ramakrishna. Niranjana, Yogin, Tarak, Kali, Haripada, Gangadhar, Saradaprasanna, Hariprasanna, Purna, Subodh and a few other boys, led by inscrutable destiny, soon assembled at the feet of the Master.

The heart of Ramakrishna was full of joy that the Divine Mother had sent him such young and vigorous souls whose minds were still unspoiled by the blemish of worldly desires and attachments. He became busy leading these boys through the path of renunciation and service, helping each one individually to grow according to his own inner potential tendencies. Ramakrishna was their father, mother, friend, companion and Guru in one. The unique relation of love which grew between the Master and his disciples, and also amongst the young aspirants themselves, proved to be a dynamic power, which eventually shook the whole world. The Master's expression of love for each disciple was different. Naren was the "other half" of the Mystic. Naren was Shiva while the spirit within the Master was Shakti, so the Mystic loved him with the acute yearning of a lover and yet there was such a serenity in his love!

Ramakrishna's unique relation with Naren, and also the latter's marvellous power of understanding, soon won for him the position of the natural leader of the group. Most of the boys were going to school during the first period of contact

with their great Master. Naren soon after graduated from the University of Calcutta, and won the admiration of his Guru and the boys. Hearing a discourse from the Master, Naren could elaborate and expound it with such force and directness that the boys always received a new light from his interpretation. Once the Master, explaining the Path of Devotion, quoted from an ancient text the expression "charity to all." Suddenly he entered into an ecstatic mood, changed his discourse, and strongly criticized the spirit of the term, "charity." "Who are you to be 'charitable'! God is in everything—say, *service to God in the distressed!*" All the devotees heard that exposition, but it entered like a flame into Naren's mighty heart. "What a new light the Master has shed on the problems of life in all its phases, by pointing out that God is in everything! It is the privilege of man to worship God in all the relations of life! The entire tide of world civilization can be changed if people will understand and live the truth contained in this one expression, 'worship of God manifest in everything'. I am going to carry this unique message to all, if ever the opportunity arises!" With the Master's

heartly approval and delight, Naren became his spokesman and interpreter.

The life of Ramakrishna, as has already been emphasized, was a powerful protest against superstition and narrowness of all kinds, and a concrete illustration of the highest ideal of truth. He did not come to glorify any particular institution, however great it might be in its own sphere. Sannyasins, or monks, could find in him the highest ideal of their particular path; while householder devotees found in his daily life a glowing example, in amazing exactness, of the detailed duties and responsibilities of a householder living with family and friends. Although a Sannyasin of Sannyasins, he did not run away from his wife and relatives, but accepted his Sahadharmini (the Sanskrit equivalent for wife, meaning partner in religion) as a real partner of his spiritual wealth. He never wore the ochre-coloured garment of a Sannyasin, the badge of renunciation. Although in repeated Samadhi he lost consciousness of ownership over his own body, at other times he was very particular about the cleanliness, orderliness and proper care of every little thing he used. It is no wonder that such a charac-

ter was claimed as the highest ideal of two such seemingly contradictory paths as Pravritti and Nivritti—the path of a householder, and that of a monk. If Ramakrishna was a trainer of brilliant Sannyasins when he taught the young disciples, he was equally an inspirer of householders when he contacted such ideal souls as Balaram Bose, Ram Chandra Dutta, Surendranath Mitra and others. The Master often visited their homes in Calcutta, where women and children of the neighbourhood had the rare opportunity of receiving soul-filling spiritual instruction from him. The home of Balaram in Calcutta proved to be a great centre for such gatherings, bringing spiritual enlightenment to many. Amongst his householder disciples the name of Mohendranath Gupta, popularly known as “Master Mahashaya” or simply “M”, will remain in history closely associated with that of his Master. “M” was a married man with several children when he met the Saint of Dakshineswar. He lived the life of an able householder in all its aspects, and yet he was worshipped as a saint by monks and householders alike. It is owing to the thoroughness of his inspired labour that the world has received the

volumcs containing the teachings of the Master.

The uniqueness of Ramakrishna's versatile spiritual genius lies in the fact that he could touch and awaken the souls of diverse types of human character, without moulding them into a standardized pattern. Girish Chandra Ghosh was an actor of rare quality, a playwright of exceptional ability, a Bohemian of daring devilry, and a drunkard of wide notoriety. Who else but Ramakrishna could have discovered in Girish the high spiritual potentiality that was his, and bring it into full manifestation without changing the distinctive qualities of his personality! The Master Artist, which Ramakrishna was, presented to the world through the character of Girish, the astounding and shocking truth that spiritual greatness does not always appear clothed in the conventional standard of morality and good conduct.

The reverse of Girish was Durga Charan Nag, known as "Nag Mahashaya, the meek and the modest". Even if the wayside dust or the withered leaf fallen in a storm could be accused of ego-consciousness, Nag Mahashaya was absolutely free from it! And yet he could be heroic in his adoration and courageous in his conviction. Nag

Mahashaya was a married man, and supported his family by his profession, that of a Homeopathic physician. He expressed his desire to renounce all and become a Sannyasin; but the Master protested, and helped him to evolve into a perfect example of "the blessed meek who inherit the earth", as kings of spiritual possessions. If a tree is known by its fruits, Ramakrishna's contribution to the store of world-spirituality is to be clearly recognized by the variety and excellence of his disciples.

What was the Holy Mother doing all those years, while the Master, like an inspired artist, was moulding exquisite forms out of the rich variety of the material presented to him in the various types of his intimate disciples? She too was sharing the Master's great mission. The wives and other women relatives of the householder disciples had met the Master in the seclusion of their own homes. Such casual contacts increased their spiritual thirst. They too, like their men, must drink more of the Divine Love from the perennial fountain of Ramakrishna. Often, disregarding social convention, some of them would form into a group and take a trip to Dakshines-

war. Even there it was not easy to find the Master free from the company of his male devotees. A high caste Hindu lady may appear before her Guru, but she cannot be seen in company with other men, even when visiting her spiritual instructor. Consequently, the ladies had to wait until the men visitors were gone, or asked to move, giving them an opportunity to come to the Master. They soon discovered a wonderful place in which to wait. The Holy Mother's small quarters thus became the favourite centre of the ladies. The Mother, with her quiet and unostentatious depth of spirituality, always inspired their hearts. Silently and imperceptibly those women received their spiritual nourishment; quietly and eagerly they lived the life in the seclusion of their homes; but surely and effectively they carried the truth to the other hearts they contacted in their daily relations. Thus the light of Ramakrishna's spiritual teachings made its way into the holy of holies of orthodox Hindu homes, "where even the sun is not permitted to peep in!"

The Master's modest room became the "parlour of devotees", many of whom came even from distant parts of India. Orthodox Hindus, mod-

ernized Brahmo Samajists, Christians, Mohammodans, Free Thinkers and Atheists assembled with equal zeal, under the all-embracing shelter of Ramakrishna's universality. The Master Architect was busy giving accurate spiritual form and embellishment to every individual soul, even while he was expounding the universal truth in a continual stream of inspired expressions. Visits to Calcutta became more frequent. There too, he carried his own atmosphere of spiritual festivity. Words of wisdom flowed from his mouth like the pure water of a beautiful fountain. He sang, he danced, he entered into Samadhi as a tired child falls asleep in the arms of the mother. The Divine Mother was constantly "rushing the supply" through him, so that there was no lack of new and newer inspiration. The Divine Mother was the all-in-all. She, in the form of the eager listeners, was receiving what she herself was "pushing out" through the speaker. The "I and my" dropped off from his consciousness. So vivid was the Divine Presence within, that the Master was unable to use any declension of the personal pronoun I, even in his ordinary conversation. "The Mother here," indicating his heart,

or "the One here" took the place of the "I". Can such an instrument of the Divine Power keep a part of his ego on the body? Let the Mother dance her dance of destruction—who cares what happens to this "stuffed pillow"!

During the summer of 1885 the Master developed what is known as "clergyman's sore throat". His vocal organs needed rest. But when the Mother speaks who is there to stop her! So it went on as before. The doctor who treated him advised the attendants not to allow the Master to talk. He came to visit his patient, stayed with him for a while, then, suddenly remembering that he had other calls to make, he looked at his watch. Could it be true, he had been listening to the words of his patient constantly for three hours! So Mother's instrument worked just the same, sometimes even with greater power than before.

Although his physical health steadily grew worse, his spiritual power became even more dynamic during that period. People of Calcutta who had heard about the Paramahansa of Dakshineswar, but had not found the time to visit him, were now coming in large crowds to receive spiritual inspiration from the God-man. The

intimate disciples who used to come once a week were now coming every day. Often they were having conferences to arrange about proper medical care, food, rest and the protection of their beloved Master from the invading crowds of eager seekers. Householders contributed money and the boys offered their services, even causing opposition at home for neglecting their studies. Naren was the natural leader of the boys, and he discussed fearlessly all matters of disagreement that had to be taken up with the older householder disciples. The Master's sickness had created the need for organized action.

Thus Kali began to dance her intricate dance, making the ill body of her child the centre of her action. The band of young men under Naren had to decide whether home, family, and worldly careers were to be considered more important than the love of their Master. Their eagerness to experience higher spiritual states increased at this period of intensity. Each one of them was thoroughly inspired with the highest ideal of renunciation and service. Ramakrishna himself became more reckless than ever in bestowing his spiritual boons. Verily, the Mother danced at his heart

with a glee never witnessed before. Even though the sick body could not talk, sing or dance, his ever-radiant glance could illumine the heart of the seekers. Many newcomers were daily receiving direct spiritual visions by his wish, glance or touch.

Once Gopal, an elderly man, came to the Master and expressed his intention of going to Ganga-Sagar—the place where the Ganges meets the sea—for a ceremonial bath. He had with him twelve pieces of Gairika-vasa—ochre-coloured cloth worn by Sannyasins—and twelve strings of Rudraksha beads, which he wanted to give to twelve holy men, at the holy spot, on that holy occasion. But how was he to distinguish the genuine from the counterfeit! Would the Master tell him how to recognize a real holy man?

“Show me the gifts,” demanded the Mystic with a smile. Gopal unwrapped his package and placed the pious offering before the Master. Touching each piece with his magnetic fingers as if to bless them, with eyes indrawn enjoying a glorious future vision, the Master emphatically said, “Leave them here, they will be given to the twelve best Sannyasins of the present age.”

Eventually twelve of the young disciples received from the blessed hands of their godly Guru a piece of Gairik cloth and a string of Rudraksha beads, considered from time immemorial as the insignia of the highest rank in spiritual pedigree. Thus Ramakrishna in his inscrutable manner laid the foundation for a powerful, new order of Sannyasins, which was to propagate throughout the world his universal message.

Considering the intensity with which the mission of the Master was advancing during the first stage of his sickness, many of his disciples thought that the apparent ill health of their Guru was caused by one of those mysterious tricks of the Divine Mother, Mahamaya the Great Player, to inspire the disciples to advance with renewed speed towards higher spiritual realization. The Mother, in due course of time, would heal the body of her beloved child. But Ramakrishna's condition did not show any improvement. Doctors opined that it was gradually developing into cancer of the throat. There was anxiety in every heart. "Couldn't the powerful mind of the spiritual giant heal his own disease, if he is induced to do so, for our sake?" thought Naren-

dranath. With great eagerness of heart he approached the Master with his request, to which Ramakrishna answered, "How can one think of the body as one's own when everything has been dedicated to the Mother? Let her do whatever she pleases with her instrument." "For our sake please go and ask the Mother to remove the illness, because we suffer, even if you don't," insisted the beloved disciple.

Finally Ramakrishna agreed. When he came out of the temple, after his visit, he was feeling humiliated and ashamed and reprimanded Naren, saying, "The Mother showed me millions of other bodies in which she was enjoying health; what difference does it make if she chooses to demolish one! Is the mortal body to be considered as a permanent treasure, when one has known it as a garment worn by the Immortal Spirit? Who, but a fool, would cling to an old suit of clothes, knowing that the indwelling soul can have a new one if it so pleases the Mother!"

This experience of Ramakrishna should serve as an eye-opener to those self-deluded ones who, while they are slaves to physical comfort, having no idea of the infinite bliss and absolute freedom

of the inner reality, foolishly consider the spirit as a means for the attainment of physical perfection and worldly success!

As a result of his constant communion with God, Ramakrishna's ever-blissful self could not think of the physical body as being of any consequence in the enjoyment of Divine Love. Instead of being disease-conscious the great Mystic became more God-conscious. His spirituality shone like the mid-day sun, bringing illumination to every heart that contacted him. But his dear disciples and holy consort could not help being deeply concerned. While the male devotees were running back and forth to Calcutta to consult different physicians, to buy medicine and necessary equipment, the Holy Mother, with her mind constantly engaged in inward prayer, was silently doing everything at home—washing, cleaning, cooking, nursing and watching over him during his repeated Samadhi. It was decided by the leading disciples that the Master should be moved to Calcutta, where medical aid and all other help would be within easier reach. Consequently, a small house was rented in which Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother were duly installed. The

devotees, almost all of whom lived in Calcutta, had more time now to be with their Master. But Ramakrishna, who had been accustomed from his infancy to live in close contact with nature, and breathe her free air, found it hard to stand the congestion, noise and smoke of the city. Shortly after, he was moved to a larger house, but after trying in vain to make this child of nature comfortable, the devotees finally decided to take him out of the city.

However, Ramakrishna's short stay in Calcutta served its divine purpose. A host of modern physicians and Vaidyas—masters of the Hindu system of medicine—were unable to work any improvement in his health; the great Mystic, on the contrary, treated the inner beings of his physicians with the healing balm of his godliness. Many of them, coming to him as agnostics and non-believers, were convinced of the divinity of the human soul, by the obvious truth of his spiritual realizations. They daily saw in Ramakrishna that the Divine Reality could not only be unfolded in an abstract way but could be sensed and enjoyed as a concrete Divine Being. While the Master was in the city many other critical

worthies, belonging to Christian and other faiths, had the opportunity of meeting him. They all agreed that they had seen one of the most universal spiritual forces ever witnessed by the eyes of man. Even some of the 'nautch girls' of Calcutta came to visit him and returned with awakened spiritual feelings which they were never to forget.

In December, 1885, Ramakrishna was moved to a beautiful suburban house with extensive grounds, about four miles north of Calcutta. The Cossipore garden, which now became the home of the Master and his attendants, witnessed for a short while the most unique scenes of intense spiritual demonstrations. The Master, even in the midst of his sinking vitality, presented a perfect picture of inward bliss. Beaming rays of spirituality were constantly issuing from his intensely kind and compassionate eyes. If beauty could be culled out of its mortal container and seen, free from its material limitations, Ramakrishna was such beauty! His divine beauty could fill every soul with an unspeakable, heavenly bliss. Slowly and softly, like a figure in dream, he could be seen walking in the grounds, sometimes alone,

sometimes attended. He was more radiant than ever, for his beloved ones were now always near him. They were spending days and nights in meditation and prayer. Naren and many other young disciples were staying in the garden, rendering personal services to their great Guru. Sleep and food were absolutely forgotten by those eager souls in the intensity of their spiritual thirst. "If the Master departs, who will guide us? Now or never! Do or die!" were the thoughts in every heart. Soon Naren experienced the highest state of Samadhi. The Master smiled with happiness at his success, but told him that he would not be given again the key to that secret store of highest spiritual treasure, until he had finished the work for which the Mother had brought him on earth. Shortly after, Naren felt within him the awakening of that rare mystic power of transmitting spirituality into others. He made one successful experiment, but the Master warned him not to use his power indiscriminately. Other disciples too were enjoying high spiritual realizations, under the guiding eyes of the Master. Verily, the sick Mystic's health retreat proved to be a Tapovana, or sacred place for severe spiritual prac-

tices. Some of the householder disciples regretted that they could not enjoy the privileges the boys were having. They had the responsibilities of family and business, so they were unable to give as much time to spiritual practices as they wished.

On the first day of January, 1886, about thirty of the prominent householder disciples came to spend their holiday in the company of their Master. They were scattered here and there in the garden when Ramakrishna came out for a walk. Girish and a few others were talking under a tree. He spoke to Girish, who, in the sincerity of devotion, addressed his Master as God Incarnate. Suddenly the frail figure of the Mystic became motionless; he was in Samadhi. Like another Shiva, he stood there ready to swallow the poison of evil, and bestow deliverance upon the whole world. Girish threw himself at the feet of his Guru. The Master touching him gently on his back said, "Be illumined!" As a mountain lake suddenly breaks its embankment and floods the arid plain, a spiritual ecstasy rushed into Girish, making him drunk with divine bliss. He shouted at the top of his voice that the Master

was God himself, ready to give deliverance to all. The rest of the householder disciples came running from all parts of the garden and prostrated at the feet of the God-man. He touched them all, one after the other, letting a strong spiritual current flow into them. It was a mad scene of extreme spiritual ecstasy. Some began to dance, some burst out singing, others entered into deep Samadhi, while one, in extreme love for his fellowmen, rushed out into the street and like a lunatic shouted to every passer-by to come in and partake of divine bliss!

Soon the Master came to a normal state of consciousness and returned to his room. The current thus released within the hearts of the devotees by the superhuman power of their Guru completely turned the tide of their lives. All of those fortunate ones gained amazing spiritual unfoldment in their subsequent lives, bringing peace and comfort to hundreds of others. The Divine Mother, through her child Ramakrishna, was staging a long drama to be enacted in all its phases throughout the centuries. The Mother is the inspirer; Ramakrishna is the able dramatist and director; his disciples and followers are the

actors. Each part has been skilfully taught and rehearsed; the players have thoroughly grasped the spirit of their roles; they are ready to start the performance; the signal has been given for the curtain to rise—it is time for the Master to move off the stage and watch the play from behind!

The physical body of Ramakrishna grew weaker and weaker; his diet was reduced to a minimum; he could hardly leave his bed; but his eyes were more radiant than ever in the constant intoxication of inward God-consciousness. One day he called Narendranath to his side, and asked the other attendants to leave the room. He motioned his beloved disciple to sit on his bed. Quietly Narendra obeyed. The Master's powerful eyes were looking straight into Naren's, who felt as if a strong current was travelling from Ramakrishna into him. Both remained still, in deep Samadhi. When normal consciousness returned to them the Master, in his feeble but emphatic voice, declared, "All that was 'here' (meaning himself) has been given to you. With this power you will do immense good to humanity, after which you will be called back to your eternal

abode." Narendra knew that the end was near. Although he was deeply moved by the thought of separation he found the spirit of his beloved Guru completely filling up every atom of his being.

It was the month of August. After the scorching heat of summer, the downpours from heaven had cooled the body of mother earth. The rivers were full, the foliage was green and thick, and birds sang in every bush. The heart of man yearned for love and union. Did the heart of Ramakrishna respond to that cosmic call for union? Did the caged bird of his soul long to soar high to its home in infinity? The waters of the infinite ocean, so long caught in the bondage of a bucket, now rushed homeward! After midnight of the 15th, a heavenly thrill of bliss entered into his frail body. Every hair stood on end. His face was aglow with a celestial smile. Was it lightning from heaven that stood steadily around the Master's body, and then returned to its heavenly abode, carrying the soft spark of the Pranas of Ramakrishna? The great Mystic entered into a Samadhi from which there was no return into normal consciousness. It was not

death, it was *immortality*!

On the bank of the Ganges the mortal remains of the great soul were dedicated to fire. The devotees realized that from then on they did not have to take recourse to physical means to contact their Guru. The released soul of their Master broke the limitations of time and space. Their human Guru became the God of their hearts! Out of the ashes of Ramakrishna the man was born Ramakrishna the Power!



SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

RAMAKRISHNA THE POWER

Why is it that the man who was born in an obscure village of India, of poor parents, and who outwardly lived the humble life of a temple priest, is worshipped and honoured as a god all over the world? Only a hundred years have passed since his birth, and yet one is surprised to find the portrait of this simple and unassuming Brahmin in fashionable homes in Sweden and South Africa, Russia and England, America and Japan, side by side with the crucifix or the statue of Buddha. Why is it that people like Professor Max Müller and Monsieur Romain Rolland, who seemingly have nothing in common with this obscure village priest, are drawn of their own accord to investigate into his life and teachings, and to write volumes about them? Why, in America, does an eminent scholar like Professor William James deal with the experiences of this simple mystic in his scholarly works? One is surprised to find a stray quotation from the sayings of this unlettered man even in a flower magazine in America. A strong and lasting fragrance of a cosmic nature must have been scattered by this great flower of mankind. Although the rose has

disappeared, the aroma is becoming more and more powerful as the open breeze carries it far and wide. If Ramakrishna the man was a groaning earthquake, Ramakrishna the power is a roaring volcano! A man comes to this earth, lives his life, dies, and is gradually forgotten; but a power in human form, even if it lives an obscure life, is only released from its earthly limitations by so-called death. It attains a super-mundane form, which grows steadily, and eventually spreads over the entire world, bringing comfort, peace and perfection to millions of souls.

For a time, after the event of the 16th of August, 1886, when the body of Ramakrishna was consumed by fire, there was a lull in the manifestation of Ramakrishna the power. The disciples were bewildered for a while, but gradually they picked up the lost thread of life. Most of the boys went home to their parents and rejoined school, while the householders became busy with their families and business.

Did the Holy Mother become a widow? Her outward mode of living after the Maha-Samadhi of Ramakrishna was very significant, and the world may understand from it what conception

she held about her married life. A high caste Hindu widow never marries again. She discards all outward embellishment of clothes and jewelry and wears nothing but pure white. She eats one strictly vegetarian meal a day, and lives a life of meditation and service. The Holy Mother always acted like a very orthodox lady in matters of clothes, food and social conventions, during her entire life. Why is it that she absolutely disregarded all social customs regarding widowhood, while she carefully observed all other traditional codes of conduct? She continued wearing her bracelet, which is to a Hindu wife what the wedding ring is to a western married woman. Her *sari* still had the red border, the significant mark of wifedom. In matters of food also she never observed the rigid practices of a widow. Unless one thoroughly realizes how orthodox the Holy Mother was, from her childhood to the last day of her life, one cannot grasp the almost shocking boldness of her conduct after the death of the Master. The Holy Mother knew that she had not become a widow at the disappearance of the mortal body of Ramakrishna. She was never wedded to the physical manifestation of her be-

loved lord. Her marriage had long ago been consummated in the realization of the absolute spiritual union of her Atman with that of the Master. Within herself, and all around, she never missed the clear vision of the Master as the Atman—how, then, could she act, even outwardly, as a widow!

Herein lies the most concrete example from which the “sensual world” may comprehend the highest ideal of marriage. The marriage of Gadadhar and Saradamani was neither an accident, nor can their married relations be passed over as the supernormal relations of a “holy couple.” If other examples set by this holy couple have any message for the sensual world, so has their marriage. Marriage is not consummated by physical relations alone, which may be considered as only an imperfect attempt to gain complete union. The idealism behind all marriage is to unite two divine sparks into one, and eventually to lead such units to infinite perfection. The attitude of each towards the other, in order to manifest happiness and harmony, can only be the attitude of a devotee towards his God of Love. It goes without saying that, even in

the case of a devotee of God, love does not manifest in its highest form until after long years of patient practice, going through hard trials, tribulations and disappointments. A lover of God triumphs in the end, because even through his difficulties he never loses his idealism—he does not live on “events and facts”, he is eternally wedded to the ideal. Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother lived a concrete illustration of a marriage complete in all its phases.

Soon after the passing away of the Master the Holy Mother retired to the sacred city of Brindavan, where she spent days and nights in meditation. A woman devotee once asked, “Mother, what spiritual realization is there that is not already yours; why then do you meditate so hard?” The Mother modestly answered, “What else can I do? The Master has left his children; many of them have not even the time to practise meditation. I must send them uplifting thoughts for their welfare and spiritual progress.” Later, the Holy Mother returned to Calcutta and lived, sometimes there, and sometimes in her village home.

Some of the young disciples had already cut

the tie of family, home and career, and at the time of his death, were living with Ramakrishna at the Cossipore garden. The householder disciples paid the rent but after the passing away of the Master the house was given up, and the boys had nowhere to go, until Surendranath Mitra, a devotee who had a heart much bigger than his purse, rented a spacious but dilapidated old house at Baranagore, then a small village on the Ganges between Calcutta and Dakshineswar, where the young disciples moved with the relics of the Master. Naren was deeply concerned about his widowed mother and family of young brothers and sisters. He could not suddenly leave them but spent as much time as possible at the Baranagore centre. Those of the disciples who could not join the centre came there often. The householder devotees found it a wonderful place in which to forget the worries of family and business, and revive the spiritual legacy left to them by their Guru. Thus Baranagore gradually took the place of Dakshineswar for the devotees of Ramakrishna. The young disciples had no other occupation than meditation, no other talk than the words of the Master, and no other

thought than the glowing example of Ramakrishna's unique life. Gradually Naren settled his family problems and took up quarters at Baranagore, adding new vigour to the God-thirsty hearts of the brotherhood. One after the other the rest of the disciples, who had gone home, came to live at the centre under the inspiring leadership of Narendranath.

There were many days when the brothers would fast, spending day and night in meditation. "The Master gave us the ochre garment of Sannyasins and our only occupation is God-realization; let us live the life of renunciation in form, as well as in spirit. Let us perform the time-honoured ceremony of Viraja and be known to the world as Sannyasins of the Order of Ramakrishna." Thus, under the resolution of Narendranath, the brothers were duly initiated into Sannyasa. The ochre colour of renunciation adorned their young bodies with a heavenly purity. Their old names were forgotten, caste was renounced, and desire for anything but God-realization was totally uprooted. Narendranath became Vivekananda; Rakhal, Brahmananda; Baburam, Premananda and Latu, Adbhutananda.

Besides the twelve who had received the badge of renunciation from the Master's own hands, a few other of the disciples joined the Order of Sannyasins thus created under the inspiration of Vivekananda.

Sannyasins belong to an ancient order of Vedantic monasticism, established in a pre-historic age. They renounce all worldly desires and ties, and live a life of absolute freedom from caste, society and rituals. Their occupation is twofold: Direct realization of God, and rendering service to humanity. The householders respectfully supply them with food; of clothes they need very few. They wander from place to place without any belongings, and carry the light of spirituality to the masses. They are reverentially addressed by the people as Swami, or Master. As a constant reminder of the infinite bliss of God-realization, the common suffix of their given names is Ananda, which means divine bliss. The first part of the name is distinctive of the special characteristic of the individual Sannyasin. Thus, Vivekananda—Viveka (discrimination)—Ananda (bliss)—means, bliss specialized as discrimination. Some of the Sannyasins live in

groups, during certain parts of the year. Such centres of the Sannyasins are called Maths, where novices are also trained.

The dilapidated house at Baranagore became the first Math of the Sannyasins of the Order of Ramakrishna. Their eager Sadhana, their sincere devotion to the Master and unselfish love for each other, purified their hearts, making them shine like the "fire of dry fuel, free from smoke." Often such a strong tide of renunciation came over them that they considered even the austere life of the Math as a bondage of comfort and fellowship. Many left the shelter of Baranagore and started on foot for solitary mountain retreats, while Shashi, now Ramakrishnananda, like a faithful watch-dog, guarded over and worshipped the sacred relics of the Master at Baranagore. There was a time when it was thought that the brothers were separated for ever never to be together again. Verily, it was the centripetal force of the Master, then manifest in Ramakrishnananda which united all the wandering brothers into one gigantic dynamo of power! Vivekananda also disappeared, and retired to the Himalayas where, sometimes alone, sometimes in company with a

younger Gurubhai—brother disciple—he spent years in rigid spiritual practices. He then took a vow of pilgrimage, to travel the whole length of India on foot, from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin. In course of his itinerancy he came in close contact with princes and pariahs alike, bringing spiritual illumination to their hearts. As the result of his free association with the people, he discovered the soul of India. When he completed his travels at the temple of Kanya Kumari,—the Divine Mother—at the southernmost point of India, he was filled with a new inspiration. He wanted to be alone, to look at India and meditate on her special heritage, and to determine her future relation to the rest of the world. He swam through the boisterous water to the farthest rock, separated from the mainland by a mile of ocean. Looking at India and reviewing his experiences, he fell into a deep meditation, which revealed to him the special mission of his Master, and the part he was to play in bringing it to its fulfilment. India must share her spiritual heritage with the rest of the world. She must receive from the West its efficiency, activity and resourcefulness. A bridge of under-



THE BUILDING IN WHICH THE PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS WAS HELD IN CHICAGO, 1893.

standing must be built between the two, across which must travel a free supply of the spirituality of India to the West, and the efficiency of the West to India!

At Madras, Vivekananda, an obscure Sannyasin of twenty-seven, was enthusiastically voted by the young university students as India's ablest spokesman and messenger. He must be sent to Chicago to represent Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions of the Columbian Exposition of 1893! The mission of his Master was already clear in his mind. He wrote to the Holy Mother for her blessing, upon receiving which, Vivekananda crossed the oceans and entered the United States of America, the land of liberty, and the youngest and most vigorous representative of the culture of the West. The message of young Vivekananda shook America to its very foundation. He was, by far, the most triumphant figure of the parliament. From coast to coast of the vast continent the message of India's spirituality was received with great enthusiasm. Europe soon heard the echo of the soul-stirring truth, and invited Vivekananda to speak directly to the heart of her people. He was eagerly heard in London,

Paris, Berlin and Rome. A new plan for a more complete world-civilization was conceived by the leading minds of Europe and America. Two permanent centres were established on the two coasts of the United States, from where the universal message of Ramakrishna began to spread slowly over America.

The triumph of Vivekananda created a tremendous upheaval in the spiritual tide of India. Youths who were beginning to be overpowered by the invading scepticism of the West were made to realize the power and glory of their spiritual heritage through the living illustrations of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. Young India accepted Ramakrishna as the symbol of universality, purity and spiritual perfection. Hindus, Mohammedans, Christians, Jains and Buddhists equally received Ramakrishna as a great power, that could lead them towards the highest goal of their own individual faiths. Inspired by the power of Ramakrishna, Hindus became better Hindus; Mohammedans became more broad-minded Mohammedans; Christians became more tolerant Christians. Instead of being the god of a sect, Ramakrishna became the feeding power behind

every sincere faith, to free it from the trammels of narrowness, bigotry and fanaticism. Ramakrishna became the image of the power of India!

The power of Ramakrishna did not remain confined to the realm of religious mysticism alone. It gradually fed and nourished the many phases of life. It idealized human relations, making a husband an ideal husband, a wife an ideal wife, and so on. The Holy Mother, the high priestess of Ramakrishna the Power, in her quiet but dynamic way, became the most potent instrument for imparting such spiritual perfection amongst innumerable householders. The power of Ramakrishna spiritualized social service, invigorated education, vivified arts and industry, and vitalized labour. Vivekananda and Brahmananda joined hands to conserve the power in a huge dynamo.

For the first time in the religious history of India, an order of Sannyasins fully and fearlessly adopted the organized methods of the West to distribute, efficiently and effectively, the enormous power of Ramakrishna to all phases of life. A board of trustees and a governing body were formed, with Swami Brahmananda as the presi-

dent of both. The Ramakrishna Math and Mission was duly inaugurated with headquarters at Belur, on the west side of the Ganges, opposite Baranagore. The ideal of the organization, as it then shaped itself before the vision of the Order, was:

(a) To bring into existence a band of Sannyasins devoted to a life of renunciation and service, from which qualified teachers and workers could be sent out to spread universal knowledge, as lived in the life of Ramakrishna.

(b) To carry on educational, philanthropic and social service work, in co-operation with lay members, looking upon all men as manifestations of God.

Vivekananda stirred the whole world by presenting the universal message of Vedanta, as illustrated in the life of Ramakrishna. The best minds of the world realized the need of spiritualizing civilization. He set in motion a strong machinery to carry the truth to the hearts of the people. He gathered together the powerful chemicals of Indian spirituality and Western efficiency. Like a great alchemist he carefully compounded them into one great mixture. The first process, of

effervescence, must overcast the sky with smoke and gas; the second stage, of precipitation, is bound to be one of internal seething and unrest; the third is expected to be the peaceful state of crystallization. The prophetic scientist foresaw that it would take many centuries for the world to derive the full benefit of his experiments. The world did not inherit the treasures left by the Buddha until two centuries after his death. The message of the Christ was not accepted until three centuries later. The power of Ramakrishna was already at work; the great mission of spiritualizing civilization was successfully shaped and started; it was time for Vivekananda to return to his "abode of eternal bliss." On July 4th, 1902, he left the mortal body, in Samadhi, at the Belur Math, the recently occupied headquarters of the Ramakrishna Order.

Whether living far or near, the Holy Mother, since the Maha-Samadhi of the Master, had always been the greatest source of strength and inspiration to all the followers of Ramakrishna. A permanent home was bought for her in Calcutta, where thousands came to receive spiritual light. While Vivekananda broadcast the message

of the Master far and wide, it was the Holy Mother who silently sent it deep into the hearts of thousands, who for generations have remained loyal supporters of the cause. Swami Vivekananda spread the message horizontally while the Holy Mother implanted it vertically.

“Rakhal Maharaj,” or Swami Brahmananda, exercised his deep influence on the younger generation, which now began to come in crowds to the Belur Math, awakening their potential spirituality. Baburam, or Premananda, drew and inspired them with his unlimited love. Hundreds of high-caste young men, mostly university graduates, joined the Ramakrishna Order for spiritual illumination, and for the consecration of their lives to the service of God, manifest in humanity. A new spirit of service surcharged the national life of India. Many centres were established, new ideals of thought and action flowed through the entire continent of India. When Vivekananda passed away in 1902, the number of Sannyasin disciples was hardly twenty-five, and the number of centres not over five. By 1935 the monastic membership has risen to about seven hundred, with a lay-membership of tens of thousands. The

number of permanent centres, established all over the world—in India, Burma, Ceylon, the Straits Settlements of Singapore, Europe, the United States, South America and South Africa—is over two hundred. In the United States alone, there are ten centres from which hundreds of men and women are receiving spiritual food.

The organization has been conducting its work under three different departments:

(A) Spiritual—ministering to the spiritual needs of the world by the example and guidance of qualified Sannyasins of the Order.

(B) Educational—by conducting permanent model schools for boys and girls, students' homes, circulating libraries, and also by sending out popular lecturers equipped with projectors, slides and films, to educate the masses. The entire continent of India, from Kashmir to Cape Comorin, and from Gujrat to Burma, has been covered with a network of such institutions.

(C) Sociological—by maintaining free hospitals and dispensaries, orphanages, homes for invalids and the aged, and by sending temporary relief during famine, pestilence, flood and other such catastrophies.

The special feature of this nation-wide movement, successfully inaugurated by the Order is that in every case the recipient of such services is respectfully looked upon as the veritable manifestation of God, serving whom one attains to a state of spiritual unfoldment. As the result of this widespread Seva-movement all phases of Indian life have received a new light. Even the workers who are serving under the Indian National Congress, for political freedom, consider the subjective aspect of spiritual unfoldment as their primary object, which never fails to bring its results on the character of the workers, although the secondary object of gaining political freedom may be delayed. As distinguished from the political agitators of any other country in the world, India is evolving a saintly type of strong workers in her Nationalists, of which Mahatma Gandhi is the most outstanding example. In the fields of arts and crafts, agriculture and labour, the same spiritual idealism predominates, making the people more peaceful, contented, steady and strong. The power of Ramakrishna has been directly and indirectly leading his country by a new path of self-realization, setting thereby an

example to the world as to how all the activities of a nation, society, family or individual can be completely spiritualized, directing every unit towards the realization of divine bliss.

Under the influence of Ramakrishna a new type of humanity, having higher ideals and aspirations, has already been evolved in different countries of the world. Today they are only a handful, but the future is bound to see a steady increase of their number and influence, for such is the demand of the age. The present political, economic and social unrest of the world is the result of its lack of spiritualidealism. Let the politicians of the world have a better understanding of the Divine Spirit within, and let the motive force of their activities be one of "Seva," or service to God, and the tide of world politics will change ! Let the financiers and capitalists of the world understand the same truth, and a heavenly shower of prosperity will enrich the world ! Let every human relation be consecrated as a step towards God-realization, and let every human creation be a manifestation of the Divine in man, and celestial beauty will adorn our earth ! Let every man, woman and child be taught that man is the sacred

abode of Divine Perfection, and not a condemned sinner ; let our education and culture be so moulded as to help every individual unfold that divinity—and a new civilization of love and peace will rule the world !

Ramakrishna the man demonstrated the truth in every phase of human life, showing that every man has the power to do as he did; Ramakrishna the Power is inspiring the advanced souls to realize such an ideal in their lives. It makes very little difference under what name a power works; the same basic force is there under any specified form or name. It must not be forgotten that Ramakrishna, even as a man, did not expect, claim or relish personal worship of his form or name; Ramakrishna the Power is far beyond such narrow limitations. A God, a saviour or a man, can be adored by hymns, prayers, rituals or offerings, but a Power does not demand any such eulogy from man; its only recognition must be its transformation into action. Electricity is not worshipped by prayers and offerings; no one contends by what name it should be called, but it is transformed into a motive force for the rendering of practical help to man. Ramakrishna the Power,

likewise, can only be transformed into a guiding force, by man, for spiritual achievement, no matter what special field of manifestation he chooses. It is foolish to claim such a power as Ramakrishna as the exclusive ideal of monks, and not of politicians and business men. Ramakrishna the Power is the universal storehouse of motive forces, while Ramakrishna the man is a book of illustrations showing in a concrete form how a Vivekananda and a Girish could equally draw from this common source to inspire their seemingly contradictory actions.

Apprehending that people might misunderstand Ramakrishna, and consider him a god, or a saint of a sect, Vivekananda, and the rest after him, never preached Ramakrishna the man. To present Ramakrishna the Power to the Western world, Vivekananda selected for his title page the broad expression, Vedanta—the name of an ancient school of Hindu philosophy, meaning, supreme knowledge—but inside the work, the interpretation of Ramakrishna the Power fills up all the space between the lines. Thus Ramakrishna the Power has been effectively released from the limitations of Ramakrishna the man by his broad-

minded followers. It cannot be claimed that this treasure is the exclusive possession of a church or a society. Even if the organization known as the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, which hitherto has been the ablest exponent of Ramakrishna, dies out tomorrow, it will not diminish the efficacy and potency of Ramakrishna the Power. As a matter of fact, it is this organization that has so beautifully illustrated the power of Ramakrishna in its many different aspects, and is destined to do so for a long time in the future.

It must not be forgotten, however, that deeper wisdom of a practical nature has always descended through a line of living sources—from the Guru to the Shishya, or disciple. The special skill of an artist can never be taught and handed on except through direct contact. Blessed are those who have been chosen as the direct mediums for the transmission of the power of Ramakrishna!

